



Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs

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Direct Care Worker Who Saved Life, Others Honored by Justice Center

The Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs is pleased to announce its Code of Conduct and Champion Award winners for 2022. These awards honor individuals who work tirelessly to improve the lives of individuals with special needs.

Today the agency honors six direct care workers for their exceptional work with the Code of Conduct awards. This award is given to staff members who embody the ethical standards outlined in the [Code of Conduct for Custodians of People with Special Needs](#). Employees who assist people with special needs are required to sign the Code, promising to help people “live self-directed meaningful lives in their communities, free from abuse and neglect, and protected from harm.”

Among the recipients of this year’s Code of Conduct Award is **Faith Howell** who works for Opengate Inc. in Westchester County. Howell was on a community outing earlier this year when she became concerned about one of the people with her. She says she just knew something was off with them. Howell immediately called a nurse to relay what was going on and advocated for the person to go directly to the emergency room. Once there, that person was evaluated and rushed into brain surgery. Howell’s keen attention to the individuals in her care and her unwavering advocacy saved this person’s life.

Other winners this year include:

Tammy Anderson, Office of People with Developmental Disabilities- Tammy Anderson has been working in direct care for more than 20 years. She is known for using the phrase “teamwork makes the dream work.” Anderson is credited for her creativity in using engaging activities to work on life skills. She created a walking club to help people learn about health and wellness. She uses cheers for a local football team to do speech exercises. And she created a holiday ball as a way to introduce different music and cultures to the individuals in her program. These opportunities allow residents to build confidence in themselves.

Zalil Bacchus, Ohel- Zalil Bacchus has spent the last two decades working with individuals with special needs. His dedication was most evident during Hurricane Sandy when he decided to move into the residential facility because he was concerned there would be staffing issues. Bacchus works to reduce the number of physical interventions needed and helps people in his care address emotional needs before they escalate. He emphasizes conflict resolution rather than intervention.

Connie Erdmann, Creedmor Psychiatric Center- Connie Erdmann's nomination describes her as an exemplary employee who emphasizes treating everyone with respect, dignity, and compassion. She continually advocates for all the people in her care, listens thoughtfully to patients and family members, and addresses each situation that is presented to her. Erdmann is also known for securing the resources needed by patients being discharged to help them be successful in their transition to the community.

Beverley Walker, Camelot Counseling- Beverley Walker has dedicated more than 20 years of her life to helping children and families whose lives have been affected by alcohol and substance use. She saw a need years ago to help people transition out of care so she started Camelot Shelter Services, first running it out of a trailer. Today that program serves more than 230 people. It helps with family reunification efforts and provides services and supports to vulnerable families. Walker firmly believes that how a person is perceived and treated by others influences how they behave so she thanks her clients for allowing her to be part of their wellness journey.

Shonda Williamson, Heritage Christian Services- Shonda Williamson's nomination was submitted by the mother of a person in her care. She describes Williamson as "a wonderful role model, exhibiting humor, calmness, and compassion". Williamson is said to be a stable influence for the people she supports. She encourages them to be independent and learn the skills they will need to make good choices in the years ahead. Williamson also risked her own health by nursing people with COVID back to health.

Justice Center Executive Director Denise M. Miranda joined Advisory Council Chair Bill Gettman in congratulating this year's award recipients.

"The job of a direct care worker requires them to be at their best every single day so they can support those in care. I am honored to be able to highlight these dedicated individuals who have left a lasting impression on their colleagues, the individuals they support, and all of us at the Justice Center. The care provided in New York is second to none thanks to their commitment to ensuring everyone lives self-directed lives free from abuse and neglect," said Miranda.

Executive Director Miranda also presented four individuals with the agency's Champion Award. Nominees can include individual staff members, community members, people receiving services or organizations that support the mission of the Justice Center. This year's winners include: Geneva Genovese (Surrogate Decision-Making Committee), Keith Peterson (New York City Administration for Children's Services), Sonny Provetto (Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker), and Shannon Stockwell (Mental Hygiene Legal Services).

In addition to today's award presentation, the Justice Center released a slideshow honoring the direct care workforce. A recording of the awards ceremony is available on the Justice Center's website.

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The Justice Center operates a toll-free hotline for people to report allegations of abuse, neglect, and significant incidents 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Anyone who witnesses or suspects an act of abuse or neglect has been committed can make a report. Because the Justice Center

is not a first responder, callers are directed to call 9-1-1 if there is an emergency that requires an immediate medical or police response.

The Justice Center has authority to investigate all reports of abuse and neglect in covered facilities and programs, pursue administrative sanctions against staff found responsible for misconduct, and its Special Prosecutor/Inspector General works with local District Attorneys to prosecute criminal offenses involving allegations of abuse or neglect. The Justice Center notifies local district attorneys of all cases of abuse and neglect that occur in their jurisdiction.

Justice Center advocates provide guidance and information to victims, their families, personal representatives, and guardians about the reporting and investigation process, offer support during criminal court proceedings, and are available to accompany victims during interviews and court appearances.